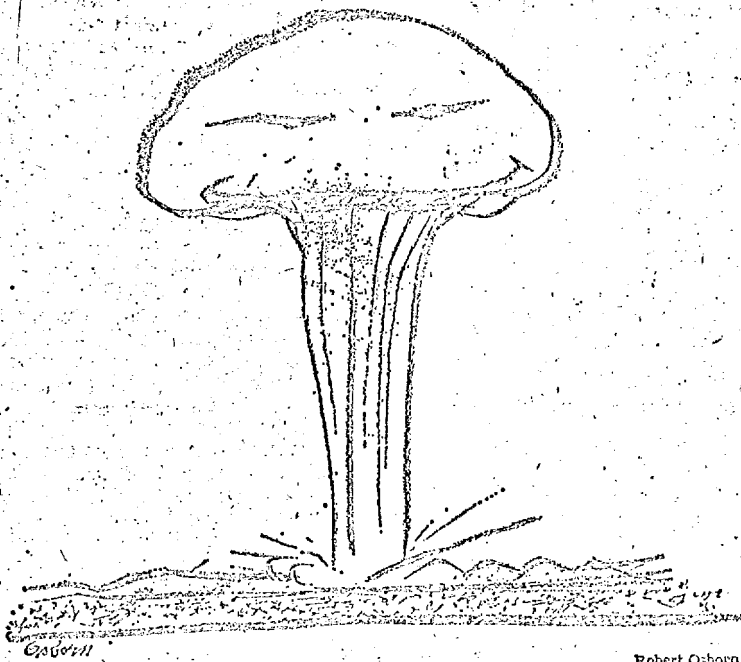


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Danger in U.S. Nuclear Policy



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By HERBERT SCOVILLE

The rumblings of a fundamental change in U.S. nuclear strategy are beginning to be heard outside the confines of our national security structure. Deterrence, the cornerstone of our strategic policies for many years, is now beginning to be decried as deficient. Nuclear "sufficiency" would be extended to include forces to fight a nuclear war, not merely to prevent one.

For the past two years Secretary Laird has justified his strategic weapons programs by invoking the need to maintain the security of the deterrent. The Safeguard ABM, he said, was required to defend Minuteman against the Soviet SS-9 missiles. U.S. MIRV's were needed to increase the retaliatory warheads against Soviet targets.

Now, arguments for new weapons to preserve the deterrent have begun to wear thin. People remember that only a few nuclear weapons launched in retaliation would cause tens of millions of Russian casualties. McGeorge Bundy pointed out in the October 1969 issue of Foreign Affairs that no political leader would launch a nuclear attack knowing that in retaliation even a few of his cities might be hit by hydrogen bombs.

Under Congressional and public scrutiny it has become increasingly difficult to defend the need for new weapons. SALT could reduce further the requirement for new weapons since it might freeze the existing state of mutual deterrence. New weapons programs might wither on the vine unless supporters could create new justifications.

The first public approach to strategic policy was the trial

The Fatal Fantasy Behind Bloodless Nuclear Engagements

balloon in President Nixon's State of the World message on Feb. 18, 1970:

"Should a President, in the event of a nuclear attack, be left with the single option of ordering the mass destruction of enemy civilians, in the face of the certainty that it would be followed by the mass slaughter of Americans?"

With this question the doctrine of flexible nuclear response was reborn. This was a return to the discredited notion of the early sixties that limited strategic war was practical; counterforce nuclear weapons to destroy aseptically military targets without endangering populations would be in vogue.

The following scenario has recently been given considerable public attention: Soviet SS-9's carrying MIRV's would destroy our Minuteman force. Their submarine missiles would knock out U.S. bombers on the ground. The President should have weapons capable of surviving this attack and then to eliminate remaining Soviet missiles so that he would not be forced to initiate population warfare.

In other words, the U.S. should be prepared to fight a circumscribed nuclear war, restricted to a duel between opposing weapons while the people were spared.

Unfortunately, the objective can least Soviet submarine missiles will be

immune from attack. To attain partial success our forces would have to be vastly improved and expanded. New highly invulnerable missiles with many accurate MIRV's would be needed.

Such sophisticated weapons could not be distinguished from first strike weapons. This would develop strong pressures for further escalation of the arms race. This new counterforce strategic policy would justify expensive advanced weapons programs directed toward invulnerability, mobility, high accuracy, multiple MIRV's, and retargeting with continuous instantaneous intelligence. A meaningful agreement at SALT would probably be foreclosed or be restricted to a ceiling on offensive missiles with free substitution to allow new deployments. An agreement of this sort would only legalize an expanded arms race.

But what an unreal world it is in which these strategists live! To knock out the Minuteman force, the Soviets would have to fire at the U.S. 1,500 or more multimegaton nuclear weapons. Not only would many Americans be killed by blast and fire, but hundreds of thousands of square miles would be contaminated by fallout. Remember, in 1954 one fifteen-megaton bomb produced lethal fallout over 10,000 square miles in the Pacific. Destroying our bombers would require many additional nuclear explosions and produce many more casualties. The combined attack would kill millions of Americans and devastate large areas.

But assuming complete Soviet success, the U.S. would still have 41 Polaris submarines with a total of 656 missiles and 1,400 warheads. When Poseidon is deployed, we would have about 5,000 warheads, each with an explosive power several times that which devastated Hiroshima.

Can a sane man believe that the Soviet would launch such an attack on the chance that the U.S. would restrict its retaliatory attack so as to avoid Soviet cities? Even the most careful retaliation would inevitably kill millions of Russians.

To believe that the Soviets would run the risk of national suicide on the gamble that the U.S. would exercise such superhuman restraint is pure fantasy. Those who postulate such scenarios have lost touch with the realities of the world.

To attempt to give the President the option to wage a bloodless nuclear war is only to increase the risk that a nuclear disaster will occur.

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